



Balance in the Eye of the Storm: Self Care When Caring for a Loved One with Mental Health Concerns

With all of the uncertainty and potentially stormy disruptions that can occur when caring for someone with mental health issues, it is critical to develop tools that can help you remain steady and balanced so that you are not swept up in the emotional upset around you.

Identify the triggers, signs, and symptoms of losing balance:

- **What was the triggering event?** What was the event, thought or experience that prompted the signs and symptoms that indicated you are off balance? This may require stepping back and becoming a curious observer, like a detective, examining what just happened from all points of view.
- **What were the signs?** Signs are the things that can be seen with the eye, like clenched fists and trembling hands.
- **What were the symptoms?** Symptoms are a person's internal reactions; thoughts, emotions, physical reactions and behaviors.

Identify the warning signs that you are off balance:

- What feelings alert you to being out of balance?
- What thoughts alert you that you are out of balance?
- What physical reactions make you aware of being out of balance?
- What behaviors alert you to being out of balance?

Returning to balance:

- **Acceptance** - You may avoid noticing the signs, symptoms, behaviors, and physical reactions as it may be painful to sit with your feelings. Accepting our feelings is a critical piece in getting relief. Once you stop resisting, not only will you feel relief, but you can use this self-knowledge to develop your action plan.



- **Build knowledge** - Oftentimes, simply learning about the illness, your own reactions and responses, new strategies for interacting and coping, can have a huge impact on your ability to manage yourself and the illness.
- **Develop an action plan** - This is a plan to help you move out of the storm. It is not a plan to change your loved one. You can let your loved one know honestly how you are feeling, what your limits are, or what you are hoping for, but beyond that, you are the only one who can make changes or live with your choices.
- **Brainstorm ideas** - Sometimes when you are upset you don't see any options. That can make the upset seem even worse. If you can let yourself brainstorm or imagine, without cutting out ideas before you let them blossom, you can in fact find many options that may provide some help.
- **Make connections** - One of the most critical connections that you can make in caring for yourself is the ability to be open to exploring all of the supports that may be available to help you stay centered when caring for your loved one.
- **Identify current supports** - Examples may include:
 - Caregiver Support Coordinator
 - Caregiver Support Line
 - VA Medical and Mental Health Providers
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Neighbors
 - Church
 - National Alliance Mental Illness (NAMI)
 - Alcoholics Anonymous
 - Narcotics Anonymous
 - Alzheimer's Association
 - Community Agencies (local 211help line)